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ABSTRACT

Schools in Alberta provide English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program support to immigrant students while they are adjusting to Canadian culture and learning the English language. This booklet is for parents who are new to Alberta, whose children are learning ESL and/or who need more information about ESL program support. A description of the education system in Alberta includes Alberta's philosophy of learning and education, the nature of communication between parents and schools, and parent-teacher interviews. Various types of ESL support are offered, including scheduled classes outside the regular classroom with ESL specialists and individual attention in the regular classroom. Several suggestions are offered for parents who want to know what they can do to help their children learn and succeed in school. Parents are advised to speak the first language at home with children, increase the amount of time they spend with their children on school work, and increase their involvement in school functions and activities. (JP)

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ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE – PARENT HANDBOOK

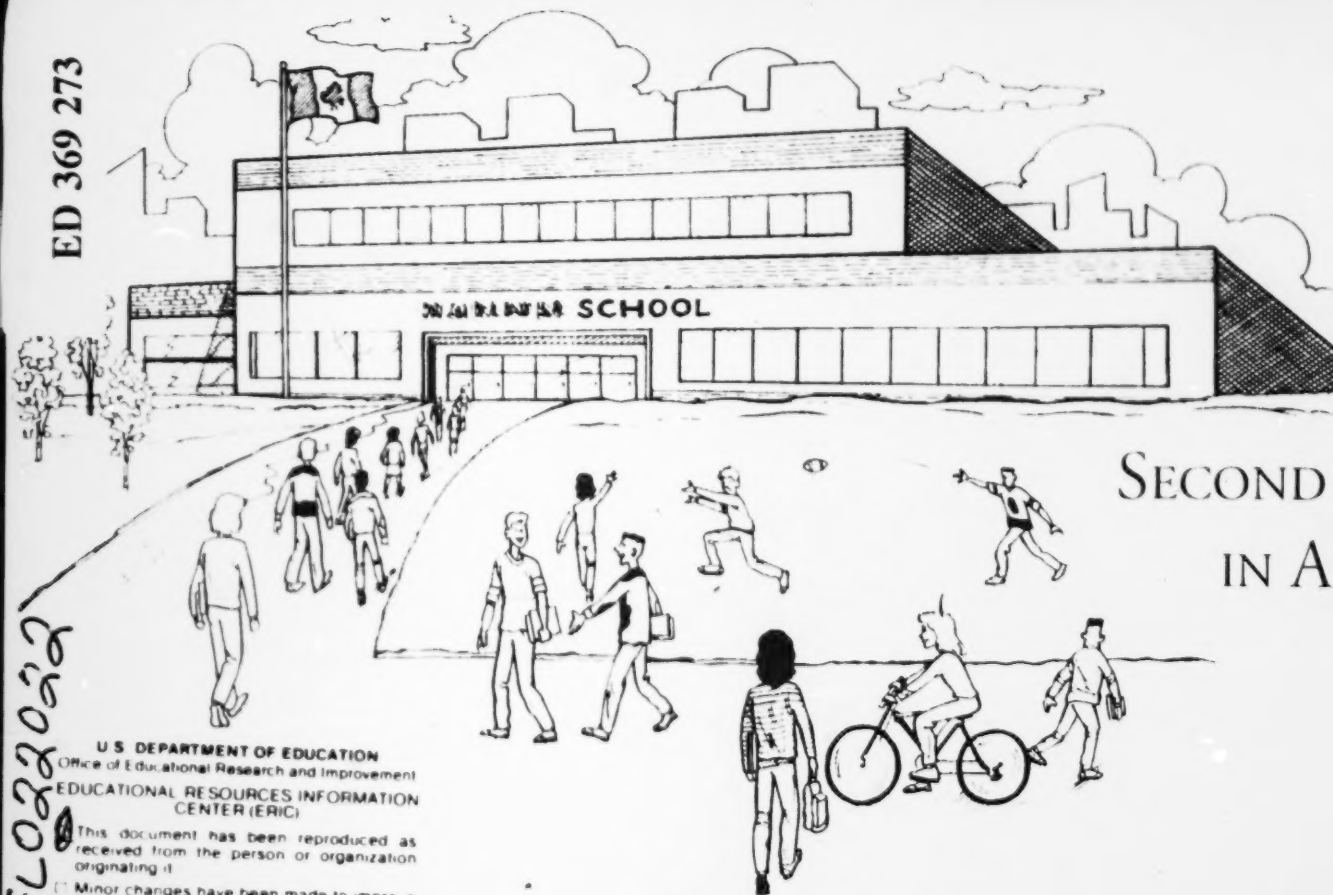
Schools in Alberta provide English as a second language (ESL) program support to immigrant students while they are adjusting to Canadian culture and learning the English language.

ESL program support helps students to develop a sense of identity, belonging and participation in all aspects of their school and community life during this time of adjustment, which may take weeks, months or years.

This booklet is for parents who are new to Alberta, whose children are learning English as a second language and/or who need more information about ESL program support. It gives you basic information about:

- how the education system in Alberta is organized
- how to communicate with your child's school
- what kinds of ESL program support may be available for your child
- how you can help your child be more successful in school.

For more information, please contact your child's school and/or any immigrant aid agency. A list of addresses and phone numbers is provided at the back of this booklet.



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ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS

PARENT HANDBOOK

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How is Alberta's education system organized?

In Alberta, students can attend kindergarten and then Grades 1-12. Grades 1 through 6 are called elementary school, grades 7 through 9 are called junior high school, and grades 10 through 12 are called senior high school.

The following chart will help you find the best grade level for your child, based on his/her age.

Age	Grades	Division
5 - 6 years	Kindergarten	Early Childhood Services (ECS)
6 - 12 years	1 - 6	Elementary
12 - 15 years	7 - 9	Junior High
15 - 18 years	10 - 12	Senior High



The law says that children in Alberta must go to school between the ages of 6 and 16. Most go to Early Childhood Services (kindergarten) and stay in school to approximately age 18. Students graduate from senior high school when they successfully complete enough courses to receive an Alberta High School Diploma. Students may stay in school if they are 19-years-old or younger on September 1. They may stay in school for the entire year, even when they turn 20-years-old. After that they can continue their education at night school.

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Children in Alberta can go to different kinds of schools. There are public schools, separate schools for members of the Roman Catholic faith, private schools that offer an alternative curriculum, and home schooling. Most students attend public schools.

Schools in Alberta offer many different courses, especially at the senior high school level. Each school has its own handbook describing the different programs at that school. When deciding on the best program for a student, parents, student and school staff all help to make the decision.

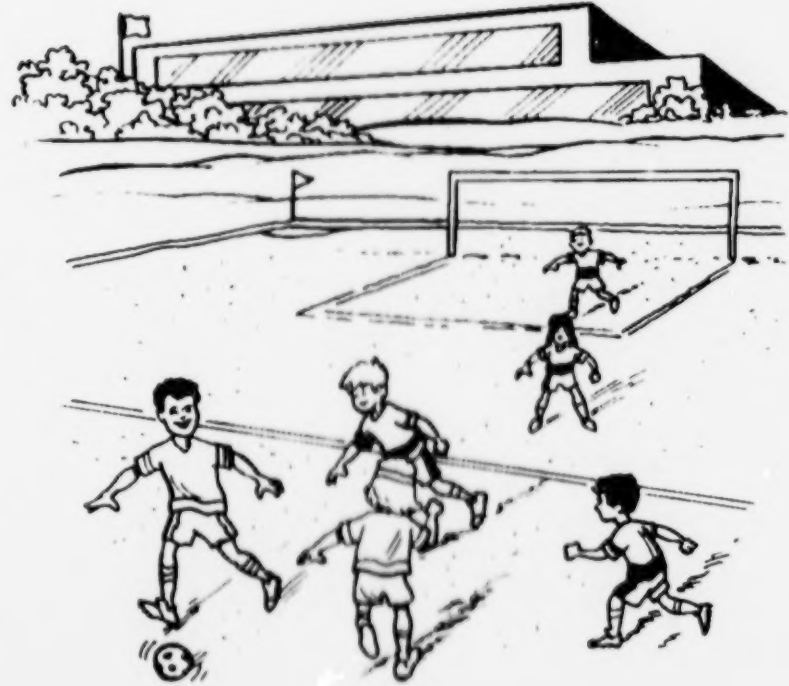
Students who have difficulty in the regular programs take the Integrated Occupational Program from grades 8 through 12. They receive a Certificate of Achievement when they finish this program.

What do we believe about learning in Alberta?

Schooling in Alberta may be different from your previous school experiences. In Alberta we believe that:

students, parents, teachers and communities are partners in the educational process. All partners are meaningfully involved in decision-making;

how students learn is as important as **what** students learn. Students participate, share, listen, research, report and explore to find the answer; out-of-school activities are important for learning. Extra-curricular activities and field trips allow students to use what they have learned; students need to develop knowledge, thinking skills and creative abilities; students must be evaluated according to their own individual progress as well as their performance in relation to other students; and, discipline procedures must encourage students to think about their behaviour and to take responsibility for it.



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How much will it cost to send my child to school?

The taxes you pay support the public and the separate schools in Alberta. You do not pay tuition fees if your child attends these schools. During the year, you may have to pay some money for special trips or activities. Senior high school students may have to pay for their own textbooks.

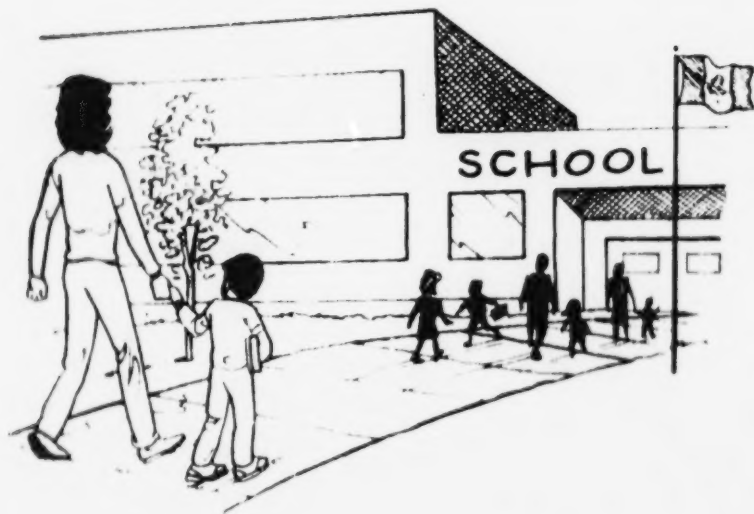
How will my child's school communicate with me?

Your child's school will use most of the following methods to communicate with you:

School handbooks usually give you information about when school starts and ends, what to do in case of sickness, after school care, use of lunch rooms, transportation or professional development days (days when your child stays home and teachers work at school).

Newsletters, notices or memos usually give you school news, any changes in school events, reminders about meetings and professional development days.

Report cards tell you about your child's progress. They come out 3 or 4 times per year.



Parent/teacher/student interviews give you a chance to discuss your child's progress and ask questions about his/her report card.

Parent information sessions give the school a chance to talk to parents, to discuss any new changes and/or to give parents a chance to help in making school decisions.

How and when do I communicate with the school?

You may contact the school and/or your child's teacher at any time. You may simply ask questions or ask for an interview to talk about your concerns or solve a problem. It is often helpful to write down your questions and/or concerns before you go to the school.

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So that you can communicate well with the school, you may use an interpreter/translator. If necessary, ask another English speaker to telephone the school for information and/or arrange the interview. You can also use an interpreter or translator to help you read notices, newsletters, memos and report cards, understand parent information sessions, and communicate at parent/teacher/student interviews.

To find an interpreter, you may contact your child's school. If they cannot help you, ask someone in your language community or call the nearest immigrant aid organization listed at the back of this booklet.

How do I learn about my child's progress?

In Alberta, schools send home a report card 3 or 4 times per year to tell you about your child's individual growth and progress.

Report cards are based on growth in knowledge, skills and attitudes. Teachers measure student progress through observations, interviews with students and marks.

Many elementary schools in Alberta do not give marks. Teachers may use descriptive comments, conferences and/or portfolios (collections of selected student work) to report and show your child's progress.

If a school does give marks, these marks come from test results, effort, participation, projects, assignments, or other work. Teachers usually use descriptive comments for beginner-level ESL students. When used, the percentages for marks in Alberta are:

Letter	Equivalent	Percent
A	80 - 100%	Excellent
B	65 - 79%	Good
C	50 - 64%	Satisfactory
F	0 - 49%	Failure

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What is the purpose of parent/teacher/student interviews?

Parent/teacher/student interviews are an important part of the reporting process. They are one way to discuss the progress of your child. Therefore, it is important for you to be there. You may use an interpreter or translator.

You or the teacher may use this time to:

- express concerns
- plan goals and/or make decisions
- share information.

You may contact the school at any time if you have concerns about your child's progress. The school may also contact you if they have any concerns and they want to involve you in any decisions about your child.



How can I help in the assessment and placement of my child at school?

Schools need information about your child's family, health, medical history, education records (if available), interests and hobbies. You can give valuable information which will help the school develop good program plans for your child.

English as a second language

Why is ESL program support provided?

Many immigrant children go through a period of cultural adjustment. They may feel confused, helpless and angry as they try to live in a culture different from their own. Besides providing language instruction, ESL programs can help your child deal with the social, physical, emotional, academic and language difficulties that may result from adapting to a new culture. In this way, ESL programs help in the adjustment process.

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Children who need ESL instruction benefit a lot from getting extra help and support for a certain period of time. ESL program support will help your child:

- learn better in the regular classroom;
- learn English more quickly; and,
- participate fully in the life of the school



How is ESL program support provided?

Your child's school may offer any of the following types of ESL program support:

- an ESL specialist who works with individual students or small groups of students at scheduled times during the day, outside of the regular classroom;
- an ESL specialist/teacher aide/resource teacher working in the classroom with the regular teacher, assisting ESL students individually or in small groups;
- specific ESL class periods, taught by an ESL specialist, scheduled outside of the regular classroom;
- the teacher helping students on an individual basis in the regular classroom.

What are the benefits of placing your child in the regular classroom?

It is also important for students who need ESL instruction to spend time in classes with their English-speaking classmates.

Lessons in the regular classroom give your child an opportunity to:

- hear English spoken by native English-speaking classmates;
- experience and use English in everyday situations;
- continue learning at his/her academic level in subject areas such as mathematics; and,
- develop confidence and motivation through participation in some of the same activities as English-speaking classmates.

How long will it take my child to learn English?

All students learn at different rates. How fast or how slowly your child learns will depend on age, first language skills, health, motivation, personality, learning style, abilities, previous education and experiences and degree of adjustment to the new culture.

Within two years, most elementary school ESL students will be able to speak conversational English. However, the skills they need for successful learning in the regular classroom may take several years to develop.

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What parents can do to help their children learn and succeed in school

Should I speak my first language at home?

Yes, you should use the language which is most comfortable for you. Strong language skills in a first language provide a more solid base for learning a second language. Students who keep skills in their first language:

- learn a second language more easily;

- transfer concepts learned in the first language to the second language;

- gain the personal and academic benefits of bilingualism.

For more information about language education in your first language you can contact the Northern or Southern Alberta Heritage Languages Association. Addresses and telephone numbers are found at the back of this booklet.

How can I help my child to learn English?

You can encourage English language development in your child in any of the following ways:

spend time with your child by asking questions, discussing samples of school work and listening;

go to the library with your child to borrow books

and/or listen to children's records, tapes or

taped children's books;

read with your child, take turns reading to each other, or tell your child stories that you heard as a child;

choose and watch TV programs with your child and talk about them together;

attend family activities in your community;

be realistic about what can be done in a certain time period. **Language learning takes time.**

Your child needs your encouragement, support and patience.



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What can I do to help my child at school?



You can help your child be more successful when you are involved in his/her education. If possible, try to become involved in any one or more of the following ways:

volunteer in the school

- help the teacher in the classroom
- supervise during field-trips or after-school activities
- translate/interpret for other parents
- serve as a guest speaker or special resource person
- help with the snack program;

visit the school to meet your child's teacher and/or to discuss your child's progress;

join the school parent-advisory committee;

go to school-sponsored concerts, sports and recreational events with your child; and,
talk with your child about his/her school work.

Immigrant Aid Organizations in Alberta

The organizations, listed below, can help you adjust to live in Alberta. The people who work in these offices are often immigrants themselves. You can call them for information and guidance on social services, health care, language training, family problems and any other difficulties.

EDMONTON

St. Barnabas Refugee Society
Suite 400, 10136 - 100 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 0P1
Telephone: 429-1986

Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
Cromdale School, 11240 - 79 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5B 2K1
Telephone: 474-8445

Changing Together - A Centre for Immigrant Women
Room 209, 10010 - 107A Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5H 4H8
Telephone: 421-0175

Edmonton Mennonite Centre for the Assistance of Newcomers
10125 - 107 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5H 0V4
Telephone: 424-7709

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EDMONTON

Catholic Social Services Immigration and Settlement Services
10420 - 107 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5H 0W1
Telephone: 424-3545

CALGARY

Calgary Immigrant Aid Society
900A, 825 - 8 Avenue, S.W.
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2T3
Telephone: 265-1120

Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
1400 - 1st Street, S.W.
Calgary, Alberta T2R 0V8
Telephone: 245-8800

Calgary Immigrant Women's Centre
230, 1035 - 7th Ave., S.W.
Calgary, Alberta T2P 3E9
Telephone: 263-4414

Calgary Association for Young Immigrants
1130 - 12 Street, S.W.
Calgary, Alberta T3C 1A7
Telephone: 244-4691

CALGARY

Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth
207 - 8A Street, N. E.
Calgary, Alberta T2E 4H9
Telephone: 234-9213

LETHBRIDGE

Lethbridge Immigrant Settlement Association
506 - 4 Avenue, South
Lethbridge, Alberta T1J 0N3
Telephone: 327-5333

CAMROSE

Catholic Social Services
#3, 4908 - 50 Street
Camrose, Alberta T4V 1R1
Telephone: 672-1304

RED DEER

Central Alberta Refugee Effort (C.A.R.E.) Committee
#202, 5000 Gaetz Avenue
Red Deer, Alberta T4N 4B2
Telephone: 346-8818

Catholic Social Services
#202, 5000 Gaetz Avenue
Red Deer, Alberta T4N 4B2
Telephone: 346-7055

MEDICINE HAT

Saamis Immigration Services Association
422 - 6th Street, S.E.
Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 1H5
Telephone: 529-0700

Language Services Branch, Alberta Education 1993

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GRANDE PRAIRIE

Peace Area Settlement Services Society
10110 - 101 Avenue
Grande Prairie, Alberta T8V 0Y2
Telephone: 538-3232

FORT McMURRAY

Young Man's Christian Association (YMCA)
221 Tundra Drive
Fort McMurray, Alberta T9H 4Z7
Telephone: 790-9622

Heritage Language Schools in Alberta

The following organizations can help you contact other members of your ethno-cultural community who may be involved in special heritage language schools for your language/ethnic group.

EDMONTON

Northern Alberta Heritage Languages Association (NAHLA)
11012 - 142 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5N 2R1
Telephone: 451-1719

CALGARY

Southern Alberta Heritage Languages Association (SAHLA)
303, 229 - 11 Ave. S.E.
Calgary, Alberta T2G 0Y1
Telephone: 233-7998